

1-571↓
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From: ahughes%pride@oup.co.uk (Alan Hughes)

Message-Id: <9401311709.AA18019@pride.oup>

To: jsl@ROCKVAX.ROCKEFELLER.EDU

Subject: OTSOG etc

Cc: amh%oupmail.oup.co.uk@oup.co.uk

← the Senior Editor of OED.

Shoulders of giants: I imagine the writer in New Scientist was reporting information got from a source such as Merton, rather than original research of his own. The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs (3rd edition, 1970) has, s.v. Dwarf, the proverb 'A dwarf on a giant's shoulders sees further of the two', with an unattributed Latin version and English ones from the 14th century, beginning with Trevisa's translation (1387) of Higden's Polychronicon. (Neither Bernard nor Newton is among those quoted.)

As lexicographers we are chiefly concerned with words rather than concepts, though the result of our work may help others investigate ideas and phenomena (e.g. the OED definition of 'energy' in its scientific sense mentions how it was originally defined by Young and later by Rankine). Take the expression about standing on giant's shoulders, for instance: if we entered this under 'shoulder' (rather than 'giant'), we could not then include the Trevisa quotation, which modernized is 'As a dwarf sitting on a giant's neck' (i.e. no 'shoulder'). An editor of a proverbs dictionary or a book like OTSOG has an advantage there. (As it happens there is a quotation in OED s.v. 'giant': 'If a dwarf on the shoulders of a giant can see further than the giant, he is no less a dwarf in comparison with the giant.' - W. R. Grove, 'Correlation of Physical Forces' (1846), p. 3.)

'Obliteration by incorporation' would need to become established as a phrase, not just an idea, for it to be considered for inclusion.

Does that clarify matters at all?

I appreciate the trouble you are going to with regard to databases, but I am not quite sure what you have in mind!

Alan

probably old copy

John

✓ 11/31/94
X... at RKW